

Paul Williams Is What Winky Was, Ten Years Ago

Written by Ron Borges

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Nothing Winky Wright has been doing the past two years has helped him prepare to face The Man No One Wants To Fight because he hasn't done anything the past two years but fight with promoters instead of fighting actual fighters.

This, quite naturally, is someone else's fault. We know this is true because in boxing problems of this nature are always someone else's fault. In this case, they actually may be.

The reason a 37-year-old man who has not fought in nearly two years - a man who stands three inches shorter and has a 10-inch reach disadvantage – chose to get into the ring with middleweight Paul Williams is, according to Wright, because no one else but The Man No One Wants To Fight would fight him.

Williams did it, Wright believes, because he is now what Wright was about 10 years ago and says he still is today. Williams is version 2.0 of The Man No One Wants To Fight.

"There ain't a lot of guys who want to fight him," Wright said. "You ask him. Or ask his promoter. They get guys turning them down left and right. But remember who did say yes: Winky Wright. They said to me, 'You want to fight Paul Williams?' I'm like, 'When?'"

"It's tough when nobody wants to fight you and, you know, you see all these other fighters getting fights. You can't get the fight just because nobody wants to fight you. It ain't because you ain't good enough. It's just they don't want to fight you. So, you know, I know how Paul feels about being avoided.

"It don't matter to me. I'll fight anybody, anywhere and I just want the people to know that if a fight don't happen, it won't be because of me. And I want them to know that when I do get a fight, that's what I'm going to do: I'm coming to fight."

Wright (51-4, 25 KO) maintains steadfastly that the only reason he hasn't fought since losing to Bernard Hopkins on a night when he absorbed more punishment than anyone could remember is because he could find no viable opponent willing to get in with him. Long considered a defensive wizard, Wright spent years plying his trade in Europe because he couldn't find an opportunity in the U.S. He finally broke through for a brief time after beating Shane Mosley twice and becoming a world champion and a regular on HBO but then he misread the market and over-priced himself and his disappearance began anew just as he was growing old.

Had he defeated Hopkins things might have been different these past two years but he did not and so he has wandered alone once again, Winky Promotions unable to put together a fight worth his time. Finally he joined forces with Oscar De La Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions, figuring their power in the marketplace might change his luck. Still no fights.

Finally HBO gave him a list of six names acceptable to them. Four – middleweight champions

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Kelly Pavlik and Arthur Abraham, former champion Jermain Taylor and ex- super middleweight champion Mikkel Kessler – all declined to face a southpaw who plays defense like Bill Russell. Wright himself refused to take on his close friend Vernon Forrest and that left him only The Man No One Will Fight.

Fortunately for Wright, he knew Williams' difficulties and so Saturday night we have a showdown between the original Man No One Would Fight and A Man No One Will Fight who is 10 years younger and claims that crown while wearing no other.

"I do know that Winky has been the most avoided fighter since I can remember," conceded Williams' promoter, Dan Goossen. "Paul has been the most feared for the last few years which I think has transcended into being avoided. They kind of go hand in hand."

Saturday night they will go into hand-to-hand, each hopeful that they can emerge from their combat with the kind of victory that will force the hand of a middleweight title holder like Pavlik or Arthur or perhaps even a super middleweight like Taylor or Carl Froch if Froch finds a way to defeat Taylor when they meet on April 25.

Yet this is a fight that also features the kind of possibilities that could be devastating to their hopes. Both are southpaws, which seldom makes for a good mix, and Wright is a defensive puzzle harder to penetrate than the Sunday New York Times crossword, which is not good news for Williams.

Williams (36-1, 27) is a banger whose nickname "The Punisher" has been well earned but he has had moments where he looked ponderous and unsure of himself and Wright is the kind of guy that creates self-doubt not with his offense but with his defense, a style only the real aficionados of the sport favor.

The larger – or at least longer – problem for Wright is that Williams not only has fought four times since he last faced Hopkins but comes to the arena with a 82-inch reach. To put that into context, it's two inches longer than Muhammad Ali's and 10 inches longer than Wright's. In other words, that's a long stick to avoid even if you were on your game, which Wright is unlikely to be after so long a layoff.

"We could've taken an easier fight just like the rest of the fighters do and go get an easy fight, get back and get a win but we want to fight the best," the original Man No One Will Fight said. "When I fight I want to beat somebody that's credible. I want to fight somebody that also can have a chance to beat me.

"Paul is a fighter that comes in and throws a lot of punches. You know, he's an exciting fighter so I'm looking for an exciting fight and I know he is too."

Actually, what Williams is excited about is fighting anybody. Or at least anybody with whom he can make a decent paycheck.

"If I wouldn't be fighting him I don't know if I'd be fighting anybody," Williams said. "So I've got to take my hat off to him for stepping up, you know what I'm saying, and giving me the opportunity

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to get out there and show my skills again.”

Williams has the somewhat unique experience of having been avoided by 147 pound champions, 154 pound champions and now 160 pound champions. Wright, for the most part, was just ignored by everyone at 154, only recently finding himself spurned by middleweights as well.

Even after he schooled Felix Trinidad, Wright seemed to garner little from it but an enhanced reputation and an even further inability to convince someone to get in with him. But now he's landed Williams and one has to wonder if getting his wish may not this time have been a mistake.

“I'm going to (come out) and do my thing,” Williams has promised. “I'm not concerned what Winky's going to do and how his defense is and all that. I'm just going to get mine in. If I'm waiting on him to step, I'll be out of my game plan. I'm just going to do my thing.”

Considering how long it's been since Wright last fought, one can see why Williams would be sure of his position. Ring rust is not an easy thing to clean off of aging reflexes. It is difficult enough for the young man who stays too long away from his trade to get it back but for a fighter of Wright's advanced years it is a far more daunting task.

That is what tune-up fights are designed to do - to allow a fighter too long away from combat to ease back into the warrior's mentality. Wright has chosen another way however, perhaps because he could find no volunteers or perhaps because he wanted the kind of money only a fighter of Williams' pedigree would command.

Whatever his reasoning, Saturday night Wright will find himself in a hot cauldron after long months out of the kitchen. What he cooks up will decide not only this fight but, for him at least, the direction the remainder of his career will head.

“It is what it is,” Wright said. “You've been off for a while and you know you've just got to come back and do what you've been doing. You know, like Paul said, you know, I've got to go in and fight my game play. He's got to go fight his. At the end of the night, we're going to see who's going to win.

“I don't feel rusty but like I said gym work and fighting are two different things. We will see when we get in the fight. You know, it has been a long time but I feel good in the gym. You just got to light up there when we get in the fight and see how it goes.”

Light up or get lit up, the latter being pretty much what Paul Williams is all about. The fortunate thing for Wright is that Williams has done his best concussive work at 147 pounds. Despite his edges in height and reach that remains his true calling but with none of the welterweight champions willing to risk what they have to face him, he and Goossen decided to step up two weight classes and see what happens.

Saturday night he finds out. So does Winky Wright. More than likely, one of them won't like the

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